



February 14, 2003

The Honorable Ann Veneman
Secretary of Agriculture
Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave, SW
Washington, DC 20250

The Honorable Gale Norton
Secretary of Interior
Department of Interior
1849 C St., NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Veneman and Secretary Norton:

We are writing regarding the “stewardship contracting” provisions in the FY 2003 Omnibus Appropriations bill that recently passed Congress. We are concerned that these provisions could severely damage the significant level of trust that has been being built among diverse community interests—including local environmental and industry groups as well as a range of local government agencies, nonprofit groups, and other business enterprises—through their participation in the existing Forest Service stewardship contracting demonstration program. We would like to request that each of you make a commitment for your departments to engage in an open process with individuals and organizations involved in the current demonstration program to develop guidelines for how the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management will implement these new provisions.

The current program, first authorized in the FY 1999 Interior Appropriations bill, has led to the development of 84 pilot projects and associated local collaborative groups. Two major accomplishments of the stewardship demonstration program have been increased trust and collaborative learning, largely achieved through the multiparty monitoring process. We fear that the expansion of stewardship contracting authorities through the appropriations rider might result in a return to the type of interest-based conflict that has torn many forest-dependent rural communities apart in the past.

As a group of partner organizations interested in restoring the health of forest ecosystems and the well-being of rural communities, we have strongly supported the development of the stewardship contracting demonstration program. We see it as an initiative for diverse community interests and federal land management agencies to learn how to work collaboratively, to build trust, and to do adaptive management by implementing projects, monitoring them through a multiparty process, and feeding information back for future project development.

We believe that the use of stewardship contracting authorities should be expanded to help support continued innovation, action, and learning in communities and regret that the stewardship contracting provisions in the appropriations rider were introduced and passed

without ever being discussed with the organizations and groups that are carrying out the current stewardship demonstration program.

A substantial amount of information has been gathered through the multiparty monitoring framework associated with the current demonstration program. National and regional multiparty monitoring teams have developed reports presenting key information and lessons collected from local multiparty monitoring groups. We believe the individuals and organizations involved in the multiparty monitoring activities have a great deal of knowledge and information to share and should be part of the process of developing guidance for the implementation of an expanded stewardship contracting programs.

At this point, we do not fully understand the intent of the provisions and we have questions about what their effects will be on how projects are implemented. Our greatest concern, however, is the potential breakdown of trust among groups that have engaged in the stewardship contracting demonstration program. To help alleviate this concern, we provide the following suggestions focused on clarifying the intent of the provisions and the process through which the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management will implement them:

- *Multiparty monitoring.* Ensure that the agencies will continue to work with diverse local stakeholders in a collaborative process to provide information useful for adaptive management. That will require information continue to be gathered at a project level. In addition, ensure that the Forest Service maintains the existing multiparty monitoring activities established under the current demonstration program.
- *Removal of “noncommercial” language.* Clarify and further emphasize that stewardship contracting is focused on restoring healthy forest ecosystems and providing local community benefits, through collaborative processes. Commercial activities may be a component of stewardship contracting projects. However, commercial timber harvesting is not a goal of the program; timber sale contracts will continue to be used for this purpose.
- *Expansion of authority for new projects.* Clarify that projects will be developed through collaborative processes with diverse local interests and will focus on providing local community benefits through best-value contracting. A credible multiparty monitoring process at the project level will also provide a safeguard for concerns about too many projects.

In closing, we urge you to carefully consider the issue of “trust” among the diverse interests engaged in stewardship contracting projects. We do not believe that new stewardship contracting projects will be able to move forward effectively without such trust at the community level. To help address this concern, we ask you to provide direction to the Forest Service and BLM to engage individuals and organizations involved in the current multiparty monitoring activities as these agencies move forward to develop guidance for implementing the new stewardship contracting provisions. We

will provide further ideas in a future letter on how these groups might be engaged in developing implementation guidelines.

Please feel free to contact either me or Gerry Gray, our Vice President for Policy, with any questions about this letter. We and our partner organizations signing below look forward to working with you on efforts to implement these new stewardship contracting provisions in a way that promotes collaboration and trust.

Sincerely,

Deborah Gangloff
Executive Vice President
American Forests

Carol Daly
President
The Communities Committee of the
7th American Forest Congress
Columbia Falls, MT

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